



THE FAMILY TREE

Supporting a Friend Who Has Been Sexually Assaulted

Your support as a friend can make a big difference to someone who has been sexually assaulted. Here are some tips to help you help your friend.

Let your friend know you want to listen. It doesn't matter so much what you say. What really matters is how you listen.

- Find time to be alone with your friend.
- Let your friend talk and don't interrupt.
- Show interest in what your friend is saying by sitting close and making eye contact.
- Nod your head occasionally to let your friend know you are still listening.
- You may feel uncomfortable with pauses and silences. Just let them happen. Give your friend time to say everything he or she wants to say.
- If your friend needs help to continue talking, try repeating back what he or she has already said.

Believe your friend. People rarely make up stories about a sexual assault.

Let your friend know you care. Give whatever expression of sympathy feels comfortable. These have worked for other teens.

- "I said it must have been so tough and frightening."
- "I cried with her"
- "I reached out and touched her hand and put my arm around her shoulder. At first I was afraid to touch her because she had been touched in such a terrible way, but it was fine."

Reassure your friend that she or he is not to blame. Questions such as, "Why didn't you scream?" or, "Were you hitchhiking?" are not helpful. Instead you might say, "It's difficult to scream when you're frightened" or "Hitchhiking is risky, but you were asking for a ride, not to be raped."

Let your friend be in control of who knows about the sexual assault. If your friend asks you not to tell anyone at school, respect his or her wishes. One teen reported, "I told two friends and asked them not to tell anyone. One of them told a bunch of people at school and rumors were spread around the entire school. People treat me differently now—either like I did something wrong or like I have a real problem. I don't want to go anymore."

Encourage your friend to tell a teacher, parent or other trusted adult. An adult can help your friend get needed medical care and counseling services. Child protective services or the police can be called because sexual assault is against the law.

For more information about sexual assault, reporting sexual assault, and sexual assault treatment services, call the Family Stressline 24 hours a day at 800-243-7337.